DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 399 078 PS 024 538

AUTHOR Yearby-Smith, Johnny
TITLE The Opinions of School Volunteers at a Suburban High School District.
PUB DATE [95]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Attitudes; *High Schools; *Older Adults; Public Service; Questionnaires; *Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS Adult Child Relationship; Illinois; *Intergenerational Relationship

ABSTRACT

Working with students gives older people renewed enthusiasm for life and a chance to pass along lessons and skills learned over a lifetime. Older volunteers provide students with a sense of continuity in a hectic world. This study used a questionnaire to determine volunteers' opinions regarding an intergenerational program in a suburban Illinois high school district. The program incorporates retired persons as volunteers in a variety of areas in the high school, thus providing opportunities for positive interaction between older and young generations. A total of 220 volunteers were selected from 500 community residents responding to a newspaper article to participate as volunteers in the program. The questionnaire was distributed by mail and returned by the volunteers to the school office. Findings indicated that the majority of the volunteers agreed that the intergenerational program was beneficial to the school district. They expressed a willingness to perform a variety of duties to help the district, including assisting with classroom activities. The volunteers agreed that there was a need for more preparation time, as well as for more time that could be spent with students needing extra help. Activities such as organizing fund raisers and building bulletin boards were judged as important as interacting with students. (KDFB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The Opinions of School Volunteers at a Suburban High School District

Johnny Yearby-Smith

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Johnny Yearby-Smith
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED 399 078

The participation in Intergenerational volunteering activities resulted in different effects on volunteers perceived memory of the Intergenerational program. Results showed that demographic factors played only a small role in whether volunteers remained in the program. The lack of Intergenerational contact allowed each generation to see itself as a separate community rather than an integral part of one larger community.

Volunteer programs that brought young and old together made it possible to bridge past and future in the present, thus imparting a sense of closeness to individual volunteers as they transmitted collective cultural and wisdom to the newest generation.

The most compelling research for expanding Intergenerational Programs are the great gains made by children and adults who participate in them. Those gains in turn rub off on the institutions involved. Teachers who have been involved with Intergenerational Programs talk about the boost and renewed energy they get from bringing generations together.

In a high school survey on Intergenerational Programs the number one concern was that the older adults would not be able to work with teenagers. Many teachers felt that the older volunteers would not be able to adapt to different student or difficult situations. Administrators who manage discipline for hundreds of students are also wary of the additional problems that an Intergenerational Program might bring.

Historically, the family, with its extended network of generations and relations, was responsible for nurturing, educating and supporting its members so volunteers and students turned to each other for

PS 022538

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

affection, championship and help with small favors and big tasks. Families counted on the oldest generation to pass on customs and skills, to instill values and to ground children in their own family histories and traditions.

In today's mobile society, older adults and students are separated by busy schedules and miles of interstate highway. Children grow up with little or no contact with older people outside their families, and older persons who live alone or in communities with others their age seldom talk to children or teenagers. It is not surprising that the generations often feel disconnected from one another.

Working with students gives older people a renewed enthusiasm for life, a chance to pass on lessons learned and skills mastered during a lifetime of experience and offered an opportunity to make a real difference in a student's life. Volunteers provided a sense of continuity in an uncertain and often frightening world.

The National Council on the Aging, Inc., defined Intergenerational as activities or programs that increase cooperation, interaction, or exchange between any two generations. It involves sharing of skills, knowledge, or experiences between young and old (National Council on Aging, Inc., 1994).

The Illinois Retirees Educating and Assisting in the Development of Students (READS) defined Intergenerational as a positive approach with opportunities for younger and older generations to interact in the neutral and natural setting of a school, church, senior center, recreational center, hospital or library (Illinois READS, 1995).

The Senior Neighbors of Chattanooga, Inc., Chattanooga, TN., defined Intergenerational as one-to-one partnership between the students of Chattanooga, Tennessee Schools and senior neighbors to share common interest that will help keep seniors active and healthy socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically (Senior Neighbors of Chattanooga, Inc., 1995).

PS 02538

Connecting the Generations publication defined Intergenerational as the purposeful bringing together of different generations as an ongoing mutually beneficial planned activities designed to achieve specific program goals. Through these programs young and old share their talents and resources, supporting each other in relationships that will benefit both the individuals and the community (AARP, 1994).

In preparation for the development of the Intergenerational Program within the school district a few key questions should be addressed. These questions should be addressed through a meeting arranged for the teachers from the community school, counselors, and volunteers who are willing to work with the older adults and students at each Intergenerational event (Henkin, 1994).

Some on the important key issues to addressed within the school district should be:

1. Compatible philosophies to meet the needs of all concerned.

2. What are the goals for the Intergenerational Program? (It is important that the goals are very general so that everyone will have an understanding of what is expected.)

3. How many older adults should be involved with the children and where will they come from? (Identify organizations within the community, corporations, business, public agencies, and the population within the community (Henkin, 1994).

Principals who recognized the potential benefits of an Intergenerational Program were willing to implement the program positively. This helped to develop teacher awareness of the programs' rational, goals, and projected outcomes. Principals motivated their teachers to volunteer their participation in the program through a prepared presentation and needs assessment that defined the roles of the principal, teachers, and volunteers. Teachers chose to participate in the program and

they were responsible for planning and directing the volunteer activities (Mersereau & Glover, 1994).

The program started small, working out the mechanics with a manageable cadre of flexible volunteers. The volunteers became more committed when they knew their suggestions and recommendations were seriously considered in the planning and managing the program. Their opinions were valued (Mersereau & Glover, 1994).

Older adults and organizations representing older people worked with the schools to counter age prejudices and promoted Intergenerational understanding. A social environment supportive of all age groups encouraged younger and older persons to make lifestyle choices which promoted healthy, productive education.

The founder of Teaching Learning Communities remarked that educators must realize that preparation of volunteers and students sets the stage for a beneficial interchange. Research from volunteer programs showed that behavioral problems may exist at the beginning of the program, but that in no time did the students take ownership of a positive relationship with their volunteers--though many educators clearly perceived Intergenerational Programming as an added burden (Angeila & Wathen, 1994).

The 1990 United States Census reported three million, or 5 percent of children have grandparents as their primary care givers. Grandparents are the primary stabilizing force and socializing influence in many households (Faux, 1994).

The Retirement Research Foundation Project examined the characteristics of older adults employed or volunteered in school facilities. The seventy participants had completed child care training in 1990, 1991, and 1992 in California, Illinois, Michigan, and Washington; all had been trained using Generations Together: a job training curriculum for older adults in school facilities.

each was state funded (Statland, 1995).

They were primarily female, racially diverse, low-income, well educated, and concerned with working conditions. Results showed that demographic factors played only a small role in whether those older adults remained as volunteers. Older adults who continued to volunteer had higher self-esteem. The study also included interviews with employers of older adults. In those interviews, the employers consistently rated older workers favorably, citing their dedication, flexibility, positive attitudes, and reliability (Statland, 1995).

Having an older person involved in classroom activities or bringing children to visit older adult centers, opened up new possibilities for creative curriculum development. Unit and lessons planned on positive self-concept, friends, and life cycles took on more meaning for students who were personally involved with older people.

Direct emotional and social support from community members to children and youth have been shown to reduce the stresses associated with family transitions, including divorce, school transition, poverty, and pregnancy. Specifically Intergenerational relationships have been associated with reducing school dropout rates, turning youth from street to mainstream life, improved coping skills, and youth increase in healthy decision making (Kuehne, 1993).

Galbo argued that everyday psychological and emotional support adults gave to students played an important and direct role in their cognitive development. He based his views on the relationship between social and cognitive development most commonly attributed to Vygotsky (Kuehne, 1993).

What did school volunteers do? They helped to extend the teacher's teaching time by reading stories, answering questions, checking students' work, created learning activities, found materials for classroom use, and worked with non-English speaking students. They enriched the

learning environment by dramatized stories, made educational materials, assisted with art projects, helped student's choose books, tape recorded their life stories, and recorded textbooks for students with special difficulties. They expanded the resources of the school by displaying special collections, gave performances or demonstrated in art, showed slides and commented on experiences in their cultures. They enlisted the community as partners with the school by providing a two-way bridge between the school and the community. This helped to stimulate greater understanding and support of school programs and enabled the community to know a school's problems and successes (National School Volunteer Program, 1996).

The implementation of the Intergenerational Program was sensitive to the time constraints faced by teachers, in was not intended to be inclusive. It was either used as a step-by-step curricula, or as a resource of ideas, used in bits and pieces that addressed the needs of the particular community, school or class of students. It is clear that schools cannot work alone to meet the needs of students. A shared approach to education in which parents and volunteers pitched in to help the school nurture, educate, and inspire students. School volunteers made the difference--one child at a time.

Volunteers were involved in virtually every facet of the operation of the school district, working with students on a one-to-one basis. Duties involved services to the libraries, classrooms, athletic events, music programs, field trips, and similar activities. School personnel identified appropriate tasks for the volunteers and planned in service activities for them so they would become skilled in performing those tasks.

Thousands of local alliances with schools have sprung up in communities across the nation in the past decade, determined to help boost children's achievement levels. These school partnership program range from ambitious multi-city business partnership programs funded by

major corporations to programs funded by major corporations for individual efforts by volunteers in neighborhood schools (AARP, 1989).

Evaluation of the Intergenerational Program allowed the staff volunteers and students to identify strengths and areas for future improvement. Evaluations were based on reactions gained from volunteers, families, and students. The results were recycled back into the planning project, expanded, or changed the approach (READS, 1995).

Schools are natural settings for Intergenerational Programs and communication. Many retried persons live within walking distance of the neighborhood schools. They have the potential of being important educational resources to students in a variety of curriculum areas. Too often in our society, retired persons are "put out to pasture." The time, knowledge, energy and incredible list of skills and experience that could be passed on to the younger generation has gone untapped.

Procedures

Population/Sample

The population of this study will be all of the residents of the district 214 community who responded to a newspaper article. There were 500 residents who responded to the newspaper article. They came from all ethnic backgrounds and all age groups.

All 500 residents of the district 214 community who responded to the newspaper article were interviewed by the district 214 school staff. This included any persons who were willing to give their time to help students and school staff. From the 500 interviewed, 220 were randomly selected to participate as volunteers in the Intergenerational Program.

The survey for this study was distributed, by mail, to the 220 school volunteers. They were

asked to indicate **Yes** or **No** to each statement by circling the corresponding response. The completed surveys were placed in individual envelopes provided and returned to the collection tray located in the school office. Follow-up letters were sent to those school volunteers who had not returned the survey.

Illinois READS (1992) survey entitled "Exit Questionnaire--Volunteers" was revised to measure volunteers opinions of the Intergenerational Program at the suburban school district as suggested in the current research.

The survey was divided into three categories: personal data which included volunteers' name, home telephone number, and the name of the teacher/school personnel they worked with, a total of twenty-eight questions, and a final statement which asked for additional comments or suggestions that could improve the quality of the volunteer program.

The instrument was pilot tested on ten individuals not included in the population study.

Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Cell Chi-Square
4352	2860	778.3
1368	2860	778.3
Chi-Square		1556.6
Total No. of Observations		220
No. Of Categories		2
Degrees of Freedom (N-1)		1

The purpose of this study was to assess volunteers opinions of the Intergenerational Program in a suburban high school district. The results of the survey were calculated; the percentages of "**Yes**" and "**No**" were analyzed to determine the opinions. Chi Square was used to determine the

statistical significance (.05) of the responses given.

Findings

The data from the questionnaire shows that the majority of the volunteers agreed that the Intergenerational Program was beneficial to the school district. School volunteers expressed an interest to help the school district. They were willing to perform a variety of duties including assisting with classroom activities.

The research findings appeared to be consistent with the study by Mersereau and Glover (1994) in which the volunteers became more committed when they knew their suggestions were seriously considered and valued in the planning and managing of the Intergenerational Program.

The research findings showed that volunteers agreed that there was a need for more preparation time and/or time spent with students who need extra help. It showed that non-helping positions such as organizing fund raisers or building bulletin boards were just as important as the volunteer's interaction with the students.

The results of the study suggests that the volunteers who came to the school varied greatly in their strengths and weaknesses as did the students. They cam with a real desire to help. They worked with the teachers to benefit the students with patience, respect, and guidance. If older persons are involved and knowledgeable about schools' today, they are much more likely to support them. The importance of enlisting the interest and support of all ages in the community in support of schools is evident as noted in the review of literature.

Bibliography

Angelis, Jane and Lisa Wathen. "Involving Older Adults in Schools." Education Week, 9 November 1994.

Block, Helene and Carolyn Koehnline. "How to Start an Intergenerational Program," Child Care Center, September 1990.

Burgess, Lovola, "Benefits of Volunteering for Seniors," Aging Network News, 20 April 1993.

Faux, Robert. "Older Workers in Child Care: A Longitudinal Study of Their Experiences and Impact." Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1994.

Goodwin, Jane. "Senior Citizens and Youngsters Learn About Each Other," Chattanooga Health Scope 2000, (Spring, 1993).

Henkin, Nancy Z., and Steven Tunick, Here's How, Vol. 13, "Organizing Intergenerational Programs." Virginia: National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1994.

Heppermann, Donna M., "Intergenerational Children's Literature: A Learning Tool." Through Volunteer Interfaith Care givers Programs, Phoenix, AZ., via Internet, 14 June 1995.

Kuehne, Valarie S., Ph.D. "Diversity in Age Communities as Rich Contexts for Child Development." Erickson, (Spring/Summer 1993).

Levitt, Judith Kline. "Tips on High Quality Intergenerational Programs." Generations United Together, November 1995.

Lindley, Maralie I., Director, "Year-End Questionnaire/Evaluation," Vol. 1. No. 1, Illinois READS. Springfield, Illinois Department of Aging, 1995.

Maurer, Erna Wine. Erna Wine Maurer: One-to-One: The Generation Connection. Produced by Erna Wine Maurer. 24 min. Terra Nova Films, Inc. 1988 Videocassette.

Mersereau, Yvonne and Mary Glover. A Guide to Community: An Intergenerational Friendship Program Between Young People and Nursing Residents. New York, Neal Schuman Publishers, 1994.

Pfeifer, Susan and Marvin Sussman. Families: Intergeneration and Generational Connections. Haworth Press, 1991.

Statland, Maureen. Aging Education and Intergenerational Programs. Paper presented as part of conference "Connecting Generations" at the annual conference of the Chicago Metropolitan Intergenerational Committee, Arlington Heights, Il., 13 March 1995.

Connecting the Generations, "Connecting the Generations." Washington: A.A.R.P. Fulfillment, 1994.

The Illinois Retirees Educations and Assisting in the Development of Students (READS) "Designing and Implementing an Intergenerational Program. "Springfield: Illinois Department of Aging, 1995.

National School Volunteers Program, Information Bank, IB-14. n.d.

Senior Neighbors of Chattanooga, Inc., "The Intergenerational Programs" ([Chattanooga, TN.] 1995]).